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## THE EDITOR'S DIARY.

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MONDAY, May 27.

Philosophy in Fiction.

THERE are two schools of thought existing to-day concerning fiction and its purposes; the one dominant on the Continent, and the other dominant in the United States and England. It is odd that the English-speaking nations are those who definitely negative the dictum of their greatest prophet. George Meredith has said that only in so far as fiction contained philosophy or theory of life should it live; and yet we, above all other peoples, continue to extol and encourage the novel of swift incident; the slightly built, lightly amusing story which can be read as a soporific, or as a momentary diversion on the trains.

From Holland, from Belgium, from Germany, from France, from Italy, and, above all, from Russia, we get novels of worth and of solid content, largely constructed, deeply conceived, slowly and deliberately written; novels that one reads to enlarge and deepen one's conception of life and conduct. Van Eeden's "The Quest," the trilogy of Fogazzaro, these are books to keep by one, even as the earlier Victorian novel was.

What a world that novel of the mid-nineteenth century offered! What a joy it would be, even to-day, to sit with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, and hear the reading of the "Fall of the Roman Empire"! How one would like to follow Aunt Pullett again through the immaculate darkened rooms of her spacious house to get from the secretary the key that opened the shrouded guest-room and take off the layers and layers of tissue-paper and see the new spring bonnet! What a leisurely joy it would be to take a day in the open with one of William Black's delightful freckled heroines, and see the sunset across the waters! If those books did not seethe with profound philosophy, at least they gave a detailed picture of a large and leisurely life worth living. It required leisure and a

detached mind to live through them and in them. And we did live in them and they became a part and a parcel of consciousness, a definite enriching of the personal life. But who is the better or, for that matter, the worse or one whit different for skimming through a dozen of the novels concocted to-day? They die before they have fairly become alive and tried their lungs. They serve the idle moment of the passing throng and are done with.

If one might give a few rules to young novelists, one would begin with: "Take three to six years for each book. Forget that there is such a thing as popularity. Write with absolute sincerity from the depths of experience, and realize that all literature depends as much upon form as upon substance. Never be afraid to feel your subject passionately, for passion is life and nothing is farther from true art than cynicism and sophistication."

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TUESDAY, May 28.

Cynicism and Decadence.

NATIONS and enterprises, constructions of all kinds, are built upon faiths. Faith is the foundation of all things. Despairing desire has never accomplished anything but the rending and annihilating of itself; but all accomplishment, all effectiveness, implies a basis of belief. It matters comparatively little what the belief is: all belief builds. To believe in human beings builds character and quality about one; to believe in national honor and greatness builds nations; to believe in civic probity makes a flourishing city. It is not what one believes, so much as the fervor with which one believes, that makes for effective results. The life without conviction is the life that wastes itself. Some belief, to live and to die for, a man must have, or life passes as a stupid and incoherent dream. Cynicism is, therefore, one of the first signs of decadence. In individual character, cynicism means personal deterioration; in a nation, it means decadence. Principles may change, they do and must; objects may shift and aims vary, but some faith, some belief, must remain firm; some glory above personal aggrandizement, some belief in goodness unseen—otherwise, ignominy and collapse are imminent.

It is the prevalence of cynicism in great cities that sets one to wondering how much can be done for the blood and the brawn, and the sturdy continuance of the nation by encouraging country life with its solid attachment to the soil, its close intercourse with

the immutable laws of nature; its more limited and more profound human ties; its slimmer risk of seeing immorality in great and purple patches. The chances for keeping intact our faith in human nature are greater in small communities. And faith in the outcome of the race is necessary to strength. To accomplish the excellent, we must first believe in it. If there be a country where faith has crumbled and cynicism is broadcast, if there be a country, as our great national philosopher has said, "where knowledge cannot be diffused without perils of mob law and statute law; where speech is not free; where public debts and private debts are repudiated; where liberty is attacked in the primary institution of social life; where the position of the white woman is injuriously affected by the outlawry of the black; where the arts, such as they have, are all imported, having no indigenous life; where the laborer is not secured in the labor of his own hands; where suffrage is not free and equal: that country is in all respects not civil, but barbarous, and no advantages of soil, climate or coast can resist these suicidal mischiefs."

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WEDNESDAY, *May 29.*

The Youthful Letter-Writer.

SOME of the most delightful literature in the world is found in the form of the unpremeditated, personal letter, and it is a great pity that multiplied activities and appliances are crowding out this long-familiar form. But in every family there is probably still kept the lock-box in which the children's letters are hoarded. Especially when young children are taken to the country every summer, leaving a father behind in the city, the lock-box fills easily, and its contents constitute a good record of the childish struggles with thought, ambitions and powers of expression. As strange, perhaps, as in some after-life our present troubles and worries here shall seem to us, must appear to the big, grown girl her childish confidence to the absent mother: "I don't sleep very well, I have so many things to think of before I grow up—how the months come after each other, how to get change for big money, and how to be polite to strangers." And the same child reported the iniquity of a younger child: "We had for our Bible lesson to-day the 'Blessed Ares,' and baby brother laughed and wouldn't say his, and Mammy sent him out the room 'coz he said, 'Blessed are the meek and they shall have a new master.'"

The loving six-year-old mother of a family of eighteen dolls sent home to an harassed and overworked father the following genial requests: "Do, please, take care of all my precious dolls while I am gone, and tell Mammy to feed them well and sit by them while they go to sleep, and let them all sleep together in my bed. Tell them I miss them, I miss them very much; and tell my go-cart that, too. And, dear father, will you please have your picture taken for me with Mammy and with all my dolls. But if that costs too much just have a picture of the dolls, for Mother has your picture (I am sorry it looks so cross), and I can see Mammy with my mind's eye, but I want a picture of my dear dolls taken all together and each one separate, just as they are. It does not matter that they are some broke and that the littlest baby has lost her head, I love them just as they are and I want very good pictures, please."

A tiny boy, away on a farm, wrote home: "I saw a cat catch a rat; she just grabbed him with all her finger-nails," and the same little boy, touched by an ardent sympathy for the father in the hot city, wrote: "I ask God every night not to let you have yellow fever. I always say 'Wilt thoust,' so I guess He'll tend to it." The technique of a correct address compassed, he felt that even Deity would be merciful. For the same father, he inscribed a long tale, formed upon the model of such literature as he had absorbed, on the subject of a saint and a friendly beast. The tale ended dramatically: "Then the deer came panting and prancing up to the baby, and seeing it, behold, the deer was tender and wouldn't fight, but he took up the young child and nursed it till it grew to be a fine, large, fat saint."

Once writing becomes a pleasant occupation in itself and an intimate knowledge of the formalities of letter-writing a source of pride, parents are apt to find small notes put about to waylay them all through the day. By the breakfast-plate, for instance: "Dear Mother, If you are not busy please sharpen all my school-pencils and believe me always, ever yours cordially, C."

Even so distinguished a writer as Mrs. Meynell received from an otherwise devoted little daughter the following unkindest cut of all: "My dear Mother, I really wonder how you can be proud of your article, if it is worthy to be called a article, which I doubt. Such a unletterarary article, I can not call it letterature --I hope you will not write any more unconventional trash."